

PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
BIPARTISAN MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH:

The Honorable Kenneth B. Lee (R)

Former Speaker of the House

111th District

Sullivan, Susquehanna & Wyoming Counties

1957-1974

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY: Simon Bronner, Ph.D.
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Transcribed by: Heather Deppen Hillard

Simon Bronner, Ph.D. (SB): My name is Simon Bronner (and) I'm with the House of Representatives Oral History Project. I'm here today with Kenneth B. Lee who represented the 111th District for Sullivan, Susquehanna and Wyoming Counties and served as Speaker of the House, Minority Leader and Majority Leader for the House of Representatives. I want to begin by asking you about your early life and how it came to be an influence on your public career?

The Honorable Kenneth B. Lee (KL): I was born, obviously. I didn't come from a particularly political family. I lived in Wellsboro [Pennsylvania] my younger years and then moved to Forksville [Pennsylvania], because my father went broke in the Depression and he went back in the lumber business and so, unfortunately, I went to a one-room school house and in High School, I went to Elkland Township Vocational High School, which was, obviously, directed toward raising pigs, chickens and (*laughs*) whatever – a little weak on math and sciences and so on.

SB: Well, what made you decide to go to law school?

KL: I'd been in the service¹ and there was a "GI Bill of Rights" and somebody else was going to pay for my education – I already had two years in college – so, I went back and finished the two years and then went on to law school. By the time I got ready to go to law school, I had two children and a wife and all the economics of ever going to school

¹ United States (15th) Air Force, Pilot (1942-1947).

again were such that I had to do it if Uncle Sam was going to help. But, no particular background for the law or any family who had ever been lawyers.

SB: Well, how did you come to be District Attorney of Sullivan County?

KL: It relates back to the fact that I had two children. I needed whatever money I could get to make enough to live on and I was in my own law firm with no people to generate any income for me except myself and the District Attorney at that time was a very elderly gentlemen who was about my age today (*laugh*), and so, they felt that they needed somebody a little younger, and so it was not a difficult decision and not a difficult election.

SB: Well, how about the transition to run for the House, which occurred fairly quickly after you took the District Attorney - ?

KL: Yeah, two years. In fact, I was so grateful for them electing me District Attorney that I agreed I would served for the remainder of my term without pay after I got in the Legislature, which I did and, if you know Sullivan County, it's 6300 people and we never have much crime, so it was not something that was very onerous. But, Sullivan County is a very close county politically, and the incumbent at that time was a Democrat² who had beaten the fellow who everybody considered was the strongest candidate in the county, and so he has been in Office for two years and there wasn't a great stampede to run

² Anthony J. Barnatovich; served from 1955-1956.

against him. So, I was young enough to think I could do it and, besides that, in a rural county the Legislator is one of the most prestigious Offices in the county and so, I ran.

SB: What do you remember about the campaign?

KL: A tough campaign, as all the campaigns were in Sullivan County. Our registration was very close and so, both the county Offices and the Legislature would change back-and-forth. So, it was just a personal campaign. Whoever could get out and see the most people and make the best impression had the best chance of winning. I guess I fooled them enough (*laugh*) to win it.

SB: What was the background of you joining the Republican Party?

KL: My father was a Republican, but not active. The only time I think I ever heard him discussing politics was with my one-room school teacher when she used to come and have dinner with us at night – she had to circulate around for meals – arguing about FDR³. She loved him and he did not. (*laugh*) It wasn't too hot, but it was hot enough that my mother stopped inviting her back (*laugh*) to avoid the argument. But, the other part of it was that just about our entire area, other than Sullivan County, are very strong Republican and that several of my friends eventually came to the Legislature – Warren Spencer [State Representative, Tioga County, 1963-1984] from Tioga County, which is a strong Republican [county], so I just gravitated there. In fact, in the rural areas of

³ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States, 1933-1945.

Pennsylvania, philosophically, there is just so little difference between the Parties that it's more a case of doing what your parents did.

SB: What was your response to coming to the House for the first time?

KL: Well, I think that everyone who comes to anything like this has no conception of what it is or how it operates. The Governor at that time was [George M.] Leader [Pennsylvania Governor, 1955-1959] and – I guess, the best thing that I liked about it, it was one of the few places that I'd ever found after being in the service, where you had such a community of interest with other people, so that where ever you contacted them you had something of interest to talk about. So, I guess maybe, the sociable part about it was (*laugh*) the thing that impressed me the most to start with.

SB: Did you have mentors in the House when you came in?

KL: No. Well, I guess the one mentor that I would have had was a fellow named Adam Bower [State Representative, Northumberland County, 1939-1966]. Adam was from Northumberland County and he was part of the “old guard;” the one's who had, from the back seats, had sort-of, run the House for years. And, I think if anyone gave me a feel for the politics of the House, it was probably him. And the other one that would have had a great deal of influence on me would've been somebody that was junior to me in the House, Al Bush [State Representative, Lycoming County, 1961-1984] from Lycoming County. He had one of the best political minds in the House. And then I got to know

Craig Truax, who eventually became State Chairman. He had been from Tioga County and he had a real mind for the political system and I probably learned a lot from him.

SB: Well, coming into the House from the 111th District, what were your concerns of representation?

KL: My area then, and probably it's still the same way, would say to me, "Look, leave us alone, except in a couple of areas, and the rest of the time we can live without you." But, they still needed money for schools, money for highways, and beyond that they would like to be left alone.

SB: At the time you started, you were just representing Sullivan County and then the District expanded. Did that provide a challenge to you?

KL: Not after I was elected. The challenge I had was that my county had about 1,800 Republicans, Wyoming County probably had about 14,000 Republicans and Susquehanna County would've been 24,000 to 25,000, and if I would have had to run against any incumbent there I couldn't have been elected. So, I probably am the most lucky guy who was ever elected to a position in the House because the fellow⁴ who was there from Susquehanna County – which would be really, the toughest – he and his County Chairman didn't get along too well. She was willing to go to him and tell him that she wasn't going to support him, she was going to support me, and that he would have a much better chance if he ran for the Senate. And she convinced him to run for the

⁴ Ray Greenwood; Republican; served from 1941-1956.

Senate and I didn't have him. A good friend of mine from Wyoming County⁵, who I had been in the House with for several years, had died recently before that. His wife⁶ then was elected and she became romantically inclined at this time, got married and didn't want the job, so I wound up with a County Chairman telling the one Legislator to get out and the other one is leaving for a honeymoon, so (*laugh*) I had a honeymoon. Once I got into Leadership – I was in Leadership then – and once I had it, I had no problems after that.

SB: Well, I should ask you then; what was the background of you entering into Leadership? Your first position was as Majority Leader, is that right?

KL: Yeah. The only reason I would have been Majority Leader or anything was because of a Legislator from Allegheny County named Chick Agnew [Willard F.; State Representative, Allegheny County, 1955-1961]. The Legislature – probably on both sides of the Senate and the House and on both sides of the aisle – the Legislative Leadership was pretty much determined by people outside the Legislature and it had been that way for years. I think Chick Agnew was sort-of an Independent from Allegheny County, knew that he was never going to get the nod from his Republican Party in Allegheny County and he wanted to take over as Majority Leader. So, they had a knock-down drag-out fight over whether or not we continue with an open election where everybody knows who is voting for whom, or a secret ballot. Chick won that one and I, and quite a few other people, helped him, but he principally was the one who pushed for

⁵ James Wynd, Jr.; served from 1957-1962.

⁶ Elizabeth Wynd; served from 1962-1966.

it. And then he licked the incumbent Majority Leader and took over as Majority Leader and, I think, he probably was the Majority Leader for about two months – and he was in his 40's – and died. So, they didn't have another donnybrook at that time, but the incumbent who had been defeated decided he was going to go to Congress. He thought he would probably be loved there more down there than he was in Harrisburg. And so, we really had a donnybrook. I think, probably – I'm not sure exactly how many candidates – but maybe six or seven candidates, and it went to five ballots. It kept getting down to myself and George Heffner [State Representative, Schuylkill County, 1957-1966] from Schuylkill County. George was the selection of the old political bosses in the state and one of the Governor's staff at that time was from Schuylkill County and so he helped him. And so, we went down to the fifth ballot and I finally won it. And I think the reason I won it was not because of anything I had shown in the House, but the Members were just so sick of having their decisions predetermined by this selection of Leadership that they really wanted a change and I obviously had no power of any kind throughout the state through a little County like Sullivan. So, they wanted somebody that they thought would represent them and not the other constituency around the state and so, they elected me.

SB: Describe the job of Majority and then Minority Leader at that time.

KL: Probably still the same way, although maybe not. All the time that I was in the House, we probably had no more than a three or four vote majority on either side, Democratic or Republican. In situations like that, everything is political. So, it was a

donnybrook. It was probably the most stressful job I think I've ever had in my life. I mean, you lived with it all the time. I mean, you didn't leave Harrisburg and forget about it. You tried to figure out what the issues were going to be next week and you tried to come up with what you thought would make some valid response to whatever was going to be brought up on the other side.

SB: Well, one of the pivotal moments, historically at that time, was the creation of a full-time Legislature and you were an advocate for that. Could you describe the background of going from a part-time to full-time Legislature?

KL: When I first went to Harrisburg, if my memory is correct, we just had bi-annual sessions. And shortly after I was there or maybe just before I came, they came up with a Fiscal Session one year and a General Session the next, and I don't think that made any sense to anybody. So, I think there was a consensus that we ought to go to a full-time session every year.

SB: Reflecting back, was there a difference between the part-time Legislature and what it tended to enact, and the full-time Legislature?

KL: Mostly the full-time Legislature came after I was gone, but in talking to the people who were still there – mostly the Members, but also some of the Leaders – they were of the opinion that [it was] much more difficult to get the fellows who were there from the late [19]70s until now to make a difficult vote. So many of them, the majority of them,

are totally reliant on the economics of being elected the next time. So, either they get elected or they don't have a job. But, most of the people in most of my time in office, outside of Leadership, had pretty much a full-time job back home, and you were down here three days a week and then worked a job back home.

SB: You mentioned coming in under Governor Leader. As Majority Leader, you had a relationship with Governor [William] Scranton [Pennsylvania Governor, 1963-1967]. Could you describe that?

KL: Yeah, it spoiled me. I, for the first time, had had the opportunity to work with the "front office." They really were more interested in accomplishing something other than their own little personal agenda. And that's very easy to work with people like that, because you're pretty much all going in the same direction. But, when you get a Governor – which I have found most of them are – have an agenda which is totally alien to whatever is going on around or the needs of the State, you find there is a great deal of room for conflict, and I had a great deal of room for conflict for both the successors of Scranton while I was in Office. The other one though, I would like to mention because – it is so funny, you know, when you become a politician everyone assumes you are going to be a politician for all of your life. I wasn't in the Leadership at the time that Lawrence was there, and I would have like to have seen Lawrence have another four years to try and accomplish what he did in the Pittsburgh area for the rest of the State. He would have probably been able to do it more than Scranton or any of the rest of them, because he had a handle on the Unions and nobody else did. And to do anything Industrially,

you've got to have both the Unions and Industry with you to make any great movement. I just think Industrially it would have been great. I have – it may take a little too much time, but –

SB: Please.

KL: I got to know Lawrence's Secretary of Commerce – I think maybe his name might have been Brennan – but, I had a small silk mill in one of my towns in Sullivan County that had lost its employers, and I was trying to get somebody to replace them, and so I was going through the Industrial Development in the Department of Commerce. So, I used to stop over in the Department once every two to three weeks to see if they were still doing anything about it, but in the meantime I had had several beers downtown with the Secretary of Commerce. So, I had got in the habit of sticking my head in his office and jabbing him when I'd go by, and this particular time I stuck my head in the office and he said, "Come on in." He said, "I got to have somebody's shoulder to cry on." He said, "I think I lost probably the best employer that we've had the opportunity of getting in in Pennsylvania." And, he wouldn't tell me who it was – they had set up a separate corporation just to look – but he told me what their needs were wherever they had been, and the closest to my area was over in Falls, but I thought that he was describing this place that I used to have to go to over in Wyoming County to my in-laws place, and so I told him about it. And so, while I sit there, he got the Department of Forest and Waters and everybody else he thought would have a decision in making it and see if it was the right kind of territory – it turns out it was Procter & Gamble – so, after about two hours

or three hours of sitting and listening to him, I got up and left. About two years later, Procter & Gamble came into Tunkhannock in Wyoming County, which eventually became my District. But, maybe that's the reason I have such a good feeling about Lawrence. He was sort-of instrumental. And he was instrumental also in putting Route 80 across the State. All of the Philadelphia politicians, and Dillworth especially, was totally opposed to it. But, he made a deal with our Senator at that time – his name will come back to me before I finish – and he had gotten into the Senate just for the purpose of trying to get an Interstate across the Northern part of Pennsylvania – Confair, “Dick” Confair⁷. So, the Governor needs a gasoline tax and he couldn't budge the Senate, which was in the Republican's hands, for one vote for the gas tax, but he had Confair over [and] talked about it and Confair finally broke rank(s) with the Republicans and gave Lawrence enough votes to get the gas tax and we got Route 80. And – I shouldn't say this, I guess but – Confair was ostracized by his peers (*laugh*) in the Senate until the day he left the Senate. But, it was the single most important vote and Lawrence helped us out, yeah.

SB: Was a lot of business conducted in the restaurants and bars around the Capitol during those days?

KL: I would say all of the good business, yeah.

SB: (*laugh*)

⁷ Zender H. Confair, 23rd & 24th Districts of the Pennsylvania Senate; Columbia, Montour, Sullivan, Lycoming, Potter, Bradford, Tioga & Montgomery Counties; served from 1959-1972.

KL: No, I think the most important part of what went on was building up knowledge of who you're dealing with and discussing what your problems are [and] who you're mad at.

SB: You worked very closely in Leadership with Bob Butera [Robert J.; State Representative, Montgomery County, 1963-1978] among others. What was your relationship then and how did you work together?

KL: Fine. I probably had two people in the House on either side that I couldn't work with and, obviously, it was very easy to work with the Bob Buteras. Bob is one of the most decent people I've known.

SB: Are there others that you would describe that were part of the alliances or people who you worked closely with during your time?

KL: Not with Delegations, with certain people that you knew in the Delegations. And I guess, because I was in rural Pennsylvania, I probably gravitated to them more than anybody else. But, I don't know of a Delegation that I – oh, I can think of two or three Legislators at certain periods [who] didn't speak to me for a year or two, but eventually when I left – maybe they were all glad to see me go – but, by the time I left we got along fine.

SB: The names [H.] Jack Seltzer [State Representative, Lebanon County, 1957-1980; Speaker, 1979-1980] [and] Evan Williams [State Representative, Bradford County, 1959-1968] also come up in relationship to that time and working with you. What do you recall of them?

KL: Evan was from Bradford County, which was right next door to me and [Warren] Spencer was in Tioga County, they were and have been – both of them have died now – but, until they died, they were still two of the best friends I ever had. We did everything that we did in life with them as families.

SB: And as Leader, you were referring to the major urban Delegations, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, and you said something about coming from a rural county and having to negotiate. Could you talk about those Delegations?

KL: No real problem. Generally, the bedroom counties around Philadelphia were probably the most responsive group of people you had to deal with. You had some individuals in each Delegation that you had to sort-of let the rest of the Delegation take care of for you, but most of them were very well-balanced and their instincts were good. Montgomery County probably was the best. You could assume that if Montgomery County sent somebody up to Harrisburg they would be the kind of people that ought to be in Harrisburg.

SB: Very often in Pennsylvania politics there's a distinction made between rural and urban politics. Are you saying that that was not your experience?

KL: Oh, sure, sure. If somebody said to me, "What were the two things that you think ought to be done to improve the Legislature?" And, as I mentioned to you earlier in the day, my first priority was that every Legislator ought to have experienced a long, deep recession. It changes their whole attitudes and it would be a good attitude change for most of them. And I guess the next one I would say, has nothing to do with urban areas. There are several urban areas that would be included, but there are other areas of the State also that I would say, "Never elect them to Leadership positions." They just live in a system that if they don't have problems themselves, then they are so used to living in that kind of an atmosphere, that they bring it to Harrisburg. When they bring it to Harrisburg or in the Leadership position, it really frustrates the rest of the House (but) without any ability, really, to do anything about it.

SB: How would living through a recession, as you mention, change your outlook?

KL: Well, it gives you a much different perception of the value of the dollar and what you do with it. That, before you spend money you would examine what your spending it on and make sure you have the vehicle by which it will work before you start throwing money at it. Most of them would start out by throwing the money because that is the easiest, and eventually the budgets just go crazy.

SB: During the early years of your tenure, historians have described that period as the time of a reform movement in Pennsylvania, talking about a change of the “guard,” from the “old guard” to “young turks,” and I imagine you would be categorized as one of the “young turks.” What do you recall on this reform period and this confrontation?

KL: Well, the whole thing had its inception in Chick Agnew getting the Leadership on the Republican side of the House on a secret ballot. Eventually, the Democrats did it and, I think to some degree, the Senate has. And it just produces a lot of things that the, so-called, vested interests are not particularly interested in.

SB: Well, one of the issues that came up at that time was the relationship of the Legislature to the Executive branch. What is your recollection of either those negotiations about the Legislature becoming more in power or working with the Governor?

KL: I don't think that's Institutional; I think the tone of that is set mostly by the Governor. You know, everybody understands when they're being given lip-service and when you're actually in a position where you can have some input. Well, the smart Governors – let's see. Yeah, I can think of two (*laugh*).

SB: You've got to name them. (*laugh*)

KL: No, the smart Governors know what they want to do and then they contact enough people around the state and in the Legislature to see if there's some parameters that they don't dare go outside of to attack the problem, or what changes should be made to make it easier to get through the Legislature. So that when it comes to the Legislature, 75 percent of your work is done. I won't name them by name but, for instance, one of the Governors wanted to adopt an income tax. And the principal reason, among other things, was because his predecessor had thought of the idea of trying to get an income tax passed [and] decided he couldn't do it. So, we now are just about to go into a Legislative campaign and he is all over the state promoting his income tax. And so, every meeting that our poor legislative candidates go to where there are people, they have to commit that they will not vote for the income tax. So, by the time we are there in Session with the bodies in Harrisburg to enact an income tax, he had preempted any possibility and we just went around in circles for about two or three months until he finally agreed that there was absolutely no votes for the income tax. And he had taken any possibility away from us and didn't realize it. And, that's why I say there are so many people in politics who have no conception of the system. And he never did.

SB: Well, what is the system? How would you characterize it?

KL: Probably the best system in the world and, in certain times, it lives up to its reputation. And that is when you're in a crisis of some kind and everybody agrees that it's a crisis and they're all going in the same direction and the amount of energy and the amount of intelligence that goes into the solution of the problem is boundless. But most

of the time, it is in things that people don't think are a real crisis and in those cases it is just terrible – you know, [the] medical problem today. If they gave it the same consideration that they give for World War II or some other problem like that, they could solve it in five or six months. But, I don't think until it's really gone down the tube that they will ever generate that kind of energy in the same direction.

SB: Well, you served from 1957-1974. Were there crisis during that time that you recall that brought people together and resulted in real change and action?

KL: Oh, I don't think there was any crisis that there would be a consensus that it was a crisis. I think the toughest vote we ever had in the House was just about [in] the first month or two that I was a Majority Leader. [Governor] Scranton decided that the Unemployment Compensation law had to be passed. It became an absolute donnybrook, where Member's houses were being shot at and they were carrying caskets throughout the hallways of the House. We had a Democratic Member of the House down in a hotel in Harrisburg because he had a bad heart and [we] knew that if he stayed up on the Floor of the House it was going to be such a turmoil that he'd [possibly] have to have a heart attack. So, we'd got somebody to bring him up for the last vote – I don't know what time of the night it was – but, it was a good place to start, because after that it was downhill as far as the – I don't think the Bill has affected anybody in any drastic way at all, but it was a case of not getting your foot in the door.

SB: What about Hurricane Agnes [1972] here on the Hill? What are your recollections of that emergency?

KL: Oh, well, that is an emergency that the Legislature can't do much of anything about. Whatever is going to have to be done, the Executive [Branch] has to do it and if they need money for whatever has been involved of the clean-up and so on, they would have to come to the Legislature. But, we would be a reactive body in that we wouldn't be active at all.

SB: You were on the Hill at time though, weren't you? What do you recall?

KL: I guess my biggest recollection is how stupid the people were that owned the Ready-Mix operation down at the lower part of the city because they could watch the waters coming up until it's about seven or eight feet up. Vehicles that probably cost 45,000 and 50,000 dollars a piece that nobody bothered moving. Other than that, how to get home, and then just watching as everybody else did.

SB: How did you get out?

KL: Oh, [I] just had to get up a couple of back ways into the hills to stay away from the River.

SB: Before we talk about the “old guard” and “new turks” I should be sure to ask you; who did you consider the “turks?” Who did you consider the “old guard?”

KL: Most everybody in the House were “turks” regardless of their age, because I don’t think [that] any of them were particularly happy about the kind of influence that outside interests had in the thing. So, they wouldn’t be out front pushing for the change, but they were quietly hoping that Agnew and the rest of the fellows that started that movement were successful.

SB: Was it generational? Did it have something to do with the military experience and Depression background of other Legislators?

KL: No, no I don’t think so. I think it was just a natural progression. Everywhere that people who had controlled things had lost touch. So, it was a case of somebody coming in to put the rest of the people who wanted a change together and getting in a position where they had enough courage to openly support the change. So, there wouldn’t be any retribution in the House from the “old guard” and the “young turks,” because I would guess with very few exceptions that the “old guard” liked it too.

SB: You also mentioned the people who you couldn’t get along with. Who were they and why do you think you couldn’t?

KL: There were only two, I think. Herb Fineman [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1977; Speaker, 1969-1972, 1975-1977] and Josh Eilberg [State Representative, Philadelphia County, 1955-1966], from Philadelphia, both of them.

SB: And why do you think those conflicts occurred?

KL: Oh, I would guess that their constituency was so different from, not only mine, but the rest of the State, and you couldn't negotiate with them; they had their agenda and they were not about to change. Roy Irvis [K. Leroy; Allegheny County, 1959-1988; Speaker, 1977-1978, 1983-1988], in fact, Roy Irvis, I think, got his promotion in the House and up into his position of leadership in the House because he became sort-of the great mediator (*laugh*) between Herb Fineman and I. We just couldn't talk to each other, and so Roy would come and talk to me and go and talk to Herb.

SB: What was your recollection of Irvis?

KL: Oh, a real statesman and a nice guy. Roy's instincts were good, and if you couldn't get along with Roy, why, you probably wouldn't get along with anybody.

SB: So, he was on the other side of the aisle in the other Party but you had a good relationship?

KL: Yeah, he would have been the Whip at the time while I am having most of my

problems with Fineman. So, he was part of Democratic Leadership, but whatever communications were going on, Roy and I did it.

SB: Well, after you were Minority Leader in 1968, then the following year you didn't have a Leadership position and then returned as Minority Leader the following year, is that correct?

KL: I guess I would have been out for, maybe, two years, and then I was elected to Speaker again.

SB: What happened in that time, if you could describe, in terms of the Leadership?

KL: Well, we obviously lost the House and I lost my Speaker's job and Lee Donaldson [State Representative, Allegheny County, 1955-1968] had been Majority Leader, so it would have been a case of me trying to knock Lee out as Minority Leader, and I just didn't feel it was fair. Actually, the Minority Leader's job is so much more difficult than the Speaker's job, so if you've had the job for two years, even if somebody can bump you, you shouldn't be bumped. And I'm not sure I could have bumped him, and if I had tried to bump him and had been unsuccessful, I wouldn't have been Speaker again in two years (*laugh*).

SB: Well, let me ask you how you came to run for Speaker?

KL: Oh, I really didn't have – the Speaker was no problem. I was Majority Leader and when the Speaker's job came up, it was a natural place to go. Why I got to be Majority Leader is probably the real stretch. We had, probably, eight or ten counties in the North-Central part of Pennsylvania. Adam Bower was a Representative from Northumberland County. Adam was one of the so-called "old guard" that would pull all the strings from behind the doors and help pretty much run the House, and he was in this group, which was sort-of unlikely. And so, we decided to get together because we were having problems with the big Delegations and we as individual counties really had not much clout. So, we decided to go together and create a little clout in the North-Central part of the State. And so, now the Majority Leader's job has come up and Philadelphia has one, Allegheny County has one, and there were probably five or six other guys from around Schuylkill County had one, that were going to run for the Majority Leader's job. And so we had gotten into the mix and decided that we ought to have a candidate, also. And so, I was selected as the Northern tiers candidate and I think, much to their surprise, I won the thing. And from then on, of course, it was sort-of downhill once you get established.

SB: Well, how do you describe the job of being Speaker?

KL: Speaker is actually very easy. I had a fellow named Eddie Moore⁸, who was generally considered to be the second-best Parliamentarian in the United States, so you just go in the Office and tell Eddie to keep you out of trouble. (*laugh*) Now, Eddie did not have much of a flair for politics or the intricacies of politics, but for what happened

⁸ S. Edward Moore; served as Parliamentarian from 1935-1964 & 1967-1968.

on the Floor; it was his lifeblood. I mean, you just did not do anything that would lower the dignity of the House if you wanted Eddie to stay as your Parliamentarian.

SB: Did you mind giving up the power of Majority Leader as Speaker?

KL: Oh no. It was probably the most stressful. I didn't have to take much of any work home as Speaker, but as Majority or Minority Leader I took all the work home and worked the full rest of the week getting prepared for the next week.

SB: How did you compare yourself as Speaker to others?

KL: Oh, as long as they had Eddie Moore they were very good. *(laugh)*

SB: *(laugh)* Okay. Well, in 1974 you decided to run for State-wide office. Can you describe how that occurred?

KL: I was going to quit the House anyway, and for all practical purposes, that was going to be my last time in Office of any kind. Then it appeared that Drew Lewis was going to get the nomination [of the Republican Party], and I just decided that I would love to be in the Executive Branch with someone like Drew Lewis as Governor, and so I made the run [for Lt. Governor]. That was the only time in my career – but, probably not, but it's the only time I can recall – that my timing was terrible. If you remember, we ran right at the height of Watergate *(laugh)*, when nobody was voting Republican. And so, other than

that, I think we probably would have been fine. But, nobody was voting for Republicans in [19]74.

SB: Do you enjoy campaigning?

KL: Yeah, yeah – in certain areas. In most areas of Pennsylvania it is fun to campaign in. Other areas it – well, it's like dealing with people. I mean, some areas they just make you feel at home and so you feel you're getting through to them and you're accomplishing something. Other areas, for whatever reason, are very cool.

SB: How did campaigning change from the early part of your Legislative career to the later part?

KL: Well, in my own District which, obviously what you want to know about, Sullivan County, was 6300 people. I was a practicing attorney and had been District Attorney and had lived there for ten years, and so I knew most of the people or knew somebody who knew somebody else, and so I literally would go door-to-door and I would get up at four o'clock in the morning and hit five or six farms while they were still doing their morning milking. And that impresses farmers and they would talk to other farmers. (*laugh*) And the other thing, we have the largest town in the community at the time when I first came here, I think, had six or seven hundred people in it and ten bars, and about half the county was much similar. And so, you'd campaign in the bars. I mean, you hit more people in the bars at that time. Now, nobody goes to the bars, but if you wanted to hit a lot of

people – and they would be, normally people that you'd have getting anywhere else – and, one of the things I discovered that didn't cost that much money, because then you'd get the bar owner talking in your favor, is that you'd go to each one of the bars (and) hit it at the time when you know there aren't too many people there and buy a drink for all the bar. And, there may be six or eight people but (*laugh*), you don't get any of their votes maybe, but you do make a happy bar owner. But – very personal, very personal. When I went over to the other counties, obviously you are then into a District that you just normally hit the picnics and their meetings and join the local Grange and this kind-of thing.

SB: Did your use of media change from the 1950s to the 1970s?

KL: Down in my area, because we didn't have that much media. You have television now that covers pretty much everything, but that gets so expensive that running for a Legislature you can't afford to buy much media time.

SB: What role did your family have in your campaigns or in your Legislative career?

KL: My wife had a lot. She is really a people person and she just dotes on getting out and talking and circulating, so she was a great asset. (*coughs*) The rest of my family were mixed. My youngest son, from the time that he was able to get any inclination of what was going on, politics was his life, from you know, five or six years (old). I had another son who when I was running for Lt. Governor, was going to school for the first time, so

he wanted to get so far away from it that he went outside the state (*laugh*) and enrolled and came back after I lost. And the rest of them were very helpful but not – in fact, I should say now that we were deficient a little because we have two of the most liberal daughters who are Democrats, who both work for the Bureaucracy in Washington (D.C.) (*laugh*) and the boys are just the opposite.

SB: The press often referred to you as a Moderate-Republican. Reflecting back, what does that mean or how did you respond to that characterization?

KL: I would think that the reason they labeled me as that is because they got to know me. If I would have been painted as a stereotype by the Leadership on other side, I was a back-mountain conservative who had absolutely no idea where Philadelphia was or what their needs were. But, one of the smartest things I did, I belonged to a hunting camp up near where I live and once a year I would invite all of the reporters up and we'd just have a picnic for two or three days and – reporters are somewhat similar to politicians, that they love it where ever there's something free to drink, and so on – and so, you know, you have enough contact with them. They don't take you out of context, they take you with whatever context they've had with you and I've found it very helpful. I kept out of that position where they have a tendency to put you in a category and never get out of it.

SB: How do you describe your politics yourself?

KL: I would say, right now, I am way over on the cynical side. I just think we can do so

much better. My son⁹, who was a total idealist and was very conservative fiscally, thought that he could change the system and he decided after six years he wasn't making a dent out of it, so he got out. And, I decided I wasn't going to change it either. I had been in long enough that you'd have some impact on it, but its sort-of a personal limited impact that as soon as you're gone it goes.

SB: Well, when did that occur and how did it occur?

KL: I think I mentioned maybe that Scranton spoiled me. And I knew what could be done with a Governor such as Scranton and with the kind of people that Scranton had on his staff, that you sort-of expected more of the Governor's that came afterward and their staffs. And you find out that what you thought was important, they did not think important at all; that they – and the Governor – usually have their own rather narrow agenda and if it leaks out that they can do something constructive it will happen. Otherwise, it's not at the top of their agenda.

SB: Well, did you consider after the [19]74 Lt. Governor run, of making another run for state-wide office?

KL: No, no, no. I guess I recognized my limitation. I would love to be behind the scenes with a good guy as Governor, but I would, I think, probably feel miserably if I were out front trying to carry the thing. I don't think my talents are that much.

⁹ Kenneth E. Lee; State Representative, 111th District, 1989-1994.

SB: Did you encourage your son to run?

KL: Oh sure. That's all he ever wanted. He really just couldn't wait until he could get out and get started. He had a very difficult start because the Legislator who was in at that time¹⁰ had wanted him to run too and had encouraged him. She said, "Now, let me know what your time table is and when you think you're ready and I will get out of office." – and this is probably not why she changed her mind, but she was a woman and she changed her mind and decided that she not only wasn't going to support him, but she was going to get out of office before it. He had just gotten out of law school. The first thing he did out after he got out of law school was starting running for the Legislature. He came from the same county I did. He had to run in the other two counties in the Primary. Both of those counties didn't have incumbents but they did have the Party-backed candidates in each one of their counties and he carried our own county, he carried Wyoming County and he came in second in the other county [Susquehanna], which was almost by a landslide. But, he worked and I think if he'd have any success down here, he would still be down here, but he got tired of it.

SB: You had mentioned that one of the contributions you made was to work with a Legislative Campaign Committee. Could you describe that and your reasons for promoting that?

KL: Well, everybody – both sides – have legislative campaigns. I used the legislative campaigns as the method of sort-of unifying our Caucus. Most of the other people who

¹⁰ Republican, State Representative, Carmel Sirianni; served from 1975-1990.

are involved in this want to make sure that they are the ones that get credit for electing the guys so they have some personal loyalty. I thought I needed more than personal loyalty to hold them together, so I set it up so that State Committee was always involved and that their local County Chairmen were always involved. During the week, what we'd get them involved was on distribution morning. So, we'd collect the money through our legislative campaign, send it down to State Committee and their treasurer down there then was the one who actually wrote the checks that we designated. They signed the check and our treasurer signed the check so that they knew it was coming from State Committee, which made them grateful to the State Committee and the State Committee would have some impact (so) when we needed some help on them, we could go to State Committee and already have a few brownie points built up. But we would also build up some points with the County Chairman by notifying him about two weeks before the guy is going to get the money, and the County Chairman then would go and tell him that this amount of money is coming from State Committee, he was just talking to the State Chairman and so on and so on. So, we got the County Chairman and State Committee all involved in that Legislator's elections. Because, there were many times that we had to go back and ask him for a tough vote that maybe on our own we couldn't have gotten it, but when State Committee and the County Chairmen are going in the same direction, we got it from him.

SB: What was your strength as a Legislator?

KL: With regard to legislation, I would say no strength. I came from an area that didn't

need much of anything – they needed education money, they needed highway money – but, in the way of the rest of the legislation that we could pass, they would probably like to have us forget them. So, legislatively I was not my strong suit. But, I knew the Legislators, both in the House and the Senate. I mean, on the Republican side, and quite a few of the Democrats too, but, I got so I knew them very personally. Not just to talk to them, but I knew whether they were farmers, whether they were mechanics, if they had a farm, whether they raised beef cattle or whatever they were fishing, so I had a, I think, probably a better working rapport with the Legislature than anybody that's ever been in the position of Leadership.

SB: How do you view the difference between the House and the Senate?

KL: I think probably the same differences there is in Washington [D.C.], probably to a lesser degree. A lot of my good friends from the House, went from the House to the Senate and, with several exceptions, it was different. But they get anointed and they feel that they are just a cut above anybody else in the process. And it would be fine if they were or if they believed it and didn't everybody else think it, why it wouldn't be a problem. But, there's exceptions. There are some great Senators that I've known over there – some of the best people we've had. But, most of them get to be a little pompous.

SB: What are your fondest memories of serving in the House?

KL: Oh, I think the friendships I've developed. We are in Florida for about six months a year now, and when we first went down we probably had about 12 couples who were right in around us that sort-of came because we were there, and three-quarters of them were old Legislators, and we're still friends with them.

SB: Are you still political?

KL: Oh, I talk about and think about it a lot (*laugh*), but as far as being active or contributing anything – .

SB: What do you consider your greatest accomplishments?

KL: Well, if you'd name something that was accomplished, maybe I can. (*laugh*) Just on a personal basis, but then after you leave you're not sure if you've accomplished much of anything. I think I probably – straightened the House out is not correct – but, I think the House was much more responsive to its constituency and to the Members and the rest of the state when I left than before I came.

SB: Do you have disappointments?

KL: No, not really. When Tom Brokaw says, "We are the greatest generation,"¹¹ actually, we were the luckiest generation. I was in politics and have lived at a time that was so much easier than the people who are following us. And we were tempered by

¹¹ Term used to denote Americans born between the years 1911-1924

things that made us react differently, but the thing probably that is worse in the system now than it used to be, is that there is a terrible tendency to try to set policy and run things by the fringes. In other words, it is much more newsworthy to have the radicals over here and the radicals over here and the news media gets so involved with those two that it makes it almost impossible for the people in the middle who have to accomplish something to do it. If there is anything, I guess, that I would say I would change – and it is impossible to change, obviously – but, we went from a time when the political Leaders had a great deal of say in the selection and the election of Officials. Now, they have almost lost it, except in a few areas, and the news media has taken over, which means that you get some bad people that the political Leaders select. But, at least there is a winnowing process that has some sense to it by people who know them. And the news media (*laugh*), I guess, have a tendency to make political whores more than statesman. They just cater so much to the fringes that the fringes think they are the ones that really ought to set policy, and there ought to be the ones who are tempering the guys in the middle to keep them somewhere within limitations, but not be running the policy and that, I think, is the real weakness of our system now.

SB: Well, if you had advice for new Legislators today, what would it be?

KL: I guess I would say, “There are going to be some tough decisions that you’ll have to make and decisions that are going to make it increasingly more difficult for you to get elected and, so, don’t get yourself involved in the job so much that you can’t make those decisions because, economically, you can’t afford to do it.” Which would go back to my

old theory that, probably, a civilian Legislature was more responsive than a highly paid Legislatures that have so many perks to do so many things for their constituents that that's all their interested in; they aren't interested in much of anything else.

SB: How do you want your Legislative career to be remembered?

KL: Probably, that I wasn't the worst Speaker. *(laugh)*

SB: *(laugh)* Well, with that, I want to thank Speaker Lee for sharing your memories with us in this project. Thank you very much.